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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A suicide bomber attacked a Shia neighborhood in Quetta, the capital city of Pakistan's Baluchistan province, on Sunday June 30, killing at least 36 individuals and wounding scores more. Sunday's attack is the latest in a string of attacks against Shias and comes amid rising violence committed against other religious communities. Two weeks earlier, three extremists, including one suicide bomber, attacked a Shia religious school in Peshawar, killing 14 and wounding at least 28.

"The new Pakistani government must take resolute action against militant organizations that carry out acts of violence against religious groups and arrest and prosecute individuals involved in mob attacks against minorities," said USCIRF Chair Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett. "Allowing violence to occur without holding killers accountable increases the climate of impunity that threatens all Pakistanis. Prime Minister Newaz Sharif needs to act swiftly."

Over the past 18 months, USCIRF has become aware of over 250 attacks targeting religious communities in Pakistan. Over 650 individuals have been killed, the overwhelming majority coming from the Shia community. Nongovernmental organizations also recently reported several drive-by shootings targeting Ahmadis. The Hindu community continues to suffer discrimination and the threat of forced conversions to Islam. The Punjabi government has not taken effective measures against those who attacked the Christian community in Jacob colony in March 2013.

“For the sake of his country, Prime Minister Sharif must confront this rising tide of violent religious extremism and ensure that the perpetrators of violence are arrested, prosecuted, and jailed,” said Dr. Lantos Swett.”

USCIRF welcomed Prime Minister Sharif’s mention of the plight of religious minorities in his maiden speech before the parliament. “However, the closure of the Federal Ministry of Interfaith Harmony sent the opposite message. This Ministry served a unique and vitally important function by bringing different faiths together. It is needed now more than ever and should be reestablished,” concluded Dr. Lantos Swett.

USCIRF’s [2013 Annual Report](#) underscores the fact that Pakistan represents the worst situation in the world for religious freedom for countries that the U.S. government does not currently designate as “countries of particular concern.” In addition to chronic violence, Pakistan’s laws, such as the blasphemy law and anti-Ahmadi laws, violate international human rights standards.